

Casting Reflections

Text: I Corinthians 13; 13

"In a word there are three things that last for ever: faith, hope and love; but the greatest of them all is love."

I imagine that most of us here this morning have at one time or another stood looking into a lake or pond, or another body of water. ^{AND WE FOUND} ~~then~~ if we tossed a pebble into the water it caused ripples and our reflection became distorted. Or perhaps we went to the room of mirrors in an amusement park and in each mirror we took on a different shape. ^{EX. MIMAS AS KIDS & IN COSTUME} ~~But~~ the real reflection ^{OF EACH OF US} is the one we see when we look into a normal mirror when combing our hair or shaving. This is the reflection that others see when they meet us. What sort of reflection do we show to others? Can they see a reflection of love? Or do they see one of hatred, or anger, or indifference to others? When we use a gauge for our lives we cannot use any other gauge than that of Christ. We must ask ourselves, "What would He have us do?" "How would He react?" If we do this we soon find that love begins to take precedence in our thinking. Jesus taught a Gospel of love. Other folk may try to tell us otherwise and would have us show hatred instead. But if I read the Bible correctly He not only taught a Gospel of love, but He lived it. It's true He used force to drive the money changers out of the Temple, but if we read closely we soon see the love reflect from Him. Paul interpreted the life of Christ in this way also. We read of many references Paul makes to love. The best known is the scripture we read this morning. At the end of the chapter in the last verse he states, "In a word there are three things that last for ever: faith, hope and love; but the greatest of them all is love."

Thomas Huxley was an English biologist and educator and an avowed agnostic. He was ~~arguing~~ at a house party and stayed the weekend as a guest along with some other people. When Sunday morning arrived everyone made preparations to go to church. Mr. Huxley approached one of the guests, a man known to have a very simple but radiant Christian faith. He said to him, "Suppose you don't go to church today. Suppose you stay at home and tell me quite simply what your Christian faith means to you and why you are a Christian." "But," said the man, "you could demolish my arguments in an instant. I'm not clever enough to argue with you." Huxley said gently, "I don't want to argue with you; I just want you to tell me simply what this Christ means to you." And so the man stayed home from church, and he told him as simply as he could of his faith in Christ and what it meant to him. When he had finished there were tears in the great agnostic's eyes and he said, "I would give my right hand, if only I could believe that." It wasn't clever argument that moved him. It was the simple presentation of

Christ that tore at his heart. But equally important is the fact that the man who stayed away from church did so at a sacrifice. A sacrifice he felt he had to make for Christ. This is love as expressed in the giving of ourselves to others. This is a part of the reflection we should each be casting. Sacrificing ourselves by sharing ourselves with others. Too often we think of sacrifice as only being done in the church. But this is not so. To sacrifice means to give up something. We all lead busy lives and keep tight schedules, but we should never become so busy that we cannot give someone who needs it, a moment of our time. I know that nothing can be more irritating or frustrating than to come home from a very difficult day and find something or someone that requires our help or assistance. But this we must do graciously and uncomplaining if we want to be Christian in action as well as in name. This is the mark of love.

To keep our reflection from becoming distorted as it does when looking into a defective mirror we need to learn to give of our substance. Anyone can give a donation or a gift. But the real secret is in how it is given. A man was walking down the street and he was stopped by a beggar. He reached into his pocket and discovered he had no money... But he reached out his hand and he said, "My brother I ~~cannot give you anything~~ can give you nothing but this." The beggar said, "You called me brother, you took my hand, that too is a gift." Our giving should always be from the heart. ^{ANOTHER ILLUSTRATION CONCERNS/WHO} A certain woman answered her door one day and there on her doorstep was a beggar looking for a handout. She got her purse and when she did she discovered that all she had was a large bill. She said to him, "All I have is this large bill, but I need a loaf of bread, go and buy the loaf of bread and bring me back the change." The man went to the store and returned and gave her the money. She gave him a small sum of it and he took it and looked at her with tear filled eyes and told her, "It isn't the money, it's the way you trusted me. No one ever trusted me like that and I can't thank you enough." This woman took a risk that perhaps only a fool would take, but she gave him more than money. She gave him of herself. The comfortable way to discharge our duty as a church member or a private citizen in giving is to give a sum of money and get it done and over with. But in true giving the giver must also give of himself as well as his substance. Because then it is given in love and not as an obligation. Paul said very aptly, "I may dole out all I possess, or even give my body to be burned, but if I have not love, I am none the better." This is the secret, to include love in all of our giving. To do this means that we impart something of ourselves as well as the gift. I think we have all heard or said the scripture that states, "God loves a cheerful giver." Paul stated this in 2 Cor. chapter 9. We are blessed when we give all things in love, whether it be giving thanks for our blessings or giving our money for needy causes. Perhaps our reflection is never more evident than when we give. For too often we all are prone to want to hang on to our possessions

and as much of our money as we can. This is only natural. But it is when we give of them in the proper spirit that we shine with a beautiful reflection. But if we give half heartedly we also shine, but rather ~~scarily~~ dully.

The reflection we cast, must ^{also} shine forth daily ~~also~~. It cannot be just something we talk about on Sunday and forget the rest of the week. It must be lived seven days a week. Abraham Lincoln chose a man to be his secretary of war who treated him with nothing but contempt. The man was Edward M. Stanton. There is a large statue of him in front of the court house in Steubenville Ohio and each time I pass it I think of this little story. Mr. Stanton poked fun at Mr. Lincoln and he called him the original gorilla. At this time there was a famous Frenchman who was in Africa hunting gorilla for zoos throughout the world and Stanton said this man was a fool to go to Africa when all he had to do was go to Springfield and he could capture the biggest one. He called him a, "Low cunning clown." To all of this Mr. Lincoln said nothing. When it came time to name a man as his secretary of war he named Stanton to the post. When asked why he chose him he replied that he was the best man for the job. He treated Stanton with every courtesy and did nothing to counteract the slurs and the barbs of this man. But the night came when Mr. Lincoln was felled by the assassins bullet in the theatre. In the little room where the presidents body was taken, there stood this same Stanton looking down at the silent face of Lincoln in all of its ruggedness, and with tears streaming down his face he said, "There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen." The patience of love ~~was~~ won out. It did not take the repaying of insult with insult or calling a name to counteract the name called. No, it was simply quiet, patient, love that won the heart of an enemy. This is the essence of what Christ was saying when he said to love your enemies. Too often the human reaction is to lash out in retaliation for a wrong committed against us. But we must learn to lash out with love. One of the popular songs of a short while ago stated, "What the world needs now is love sweet love, that's the only thing there is just too little of." And how true this is today. We are living in an age where a large segment of the world has forgotten the meaning of love. The strange part of it is that many of the so called Christian leaders are advocates of hatred and violence. In 1968 for instance the National Council of Churches met and passed a resolution stating, (and this is not the actual quote but a shortened version of it. I have the quote written down if anyone needs proof.) that if peaceful means does not produce results then Christians may feel called upon to seek results in resistance or revolution. Now if this is the message that Christ spoke then I believe I am reading the wrong book. He spoke of love, not hatred. He spoke of peace and not war. He spoke of helping one another and not trying to get ahead of the other fellow by hook or crook. This is the kind of reflection that He wants us to cast. A reflection of love in all things and in all ways.

We shall sing as our last hymn, "O love that wilt not let me go." This was written by Dr. George Matheson one of Scotland's better known preachers. He became totally blind soon after he entered Glasgow university but ^{still} he graduated when he was nineteen, and went from there into the ministry. He said he composed this hymn in a matter of five minutes and it was as though it was dictated to him by some inward voice, rather than him working it out himself. But the reflection of Christ is there when he states, "O love that wilt not let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee." And the last verse tells, "O cross that liftest up my head, I dare not ask to fly from thee; I lay in dust life's glory dead, and from the ground there blossoms red life that shall endless be."

Once Christ comes into our lives we have this love that won't let us go and when we come to the cross of Christ our lives are changed and we can't escape from His love. At the end of this life's journey we have endless life and this is also a reflection from Christ. So you see our entire Christian life is permeated with this love, this reflection of Christ and we in turn must cast this reflection to others by the living and giving of ourselves daily. "In a word there are three things that last for ever: faith, hope and love; but the greatest of them all is love."